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IN THE HEIGHTS.

THE higher regions of our globe awaken our curiosity in a great degree; still they remain surrounded by much mystery, whether we try to discover their phenomena or their constitution. We climb mountains, we ascend in balloons, we turn our telescopes towards the celestial bodies, and invent a thousand instruments to discover the reasons of the least effects produced by physical means in the space which separates us. Yet life is intimately connected with the soil; the bird which soars through the air must descend continually to seek its proper nourishment. Of all the mammiferous tribes, man alone has the boldness to rise in the air and suspend himself in the atmosphere at the height of many thousand feet. But the intense cold of these prodigious elevations hinders him from remaining long under conditions which are not made for life.

Still it is by no means uninteresting, when climbing mountains, where animal and vegetable life are so rare, to remark the decrease of the fauna and flora, and to see what transformations nature is subject to before being wholly effaced. Among the atmospheric conditions necessary to organised beings, the temperature plays the principal part; pressure seems to exercise little influence. The celebrated botanist, De Candolle, has demonstrated that absolute height never acts on the circulation of the sap in plants, or on the respiratory organs of leaves. It is a well-known fact that there are thousands of species which are met with at very different heights, with the exception of a small number of plants strictly confined to certain restricted mountain regions. The culture of Alpine plants in our gardens confirms this; since it is easy to preserve them in the plains when the temperature and humidity are suitable. Our cereals cease to grow at a certain height in Europe, but that is not owing to the rarity of the air, since we see them thrive in South America at a much higher elevation.

Heat and damp are the two principal causes

which preside over the altitude of the growth of the vegetable kingdom. The similarity between the different stages of a high mountain and different latitudes has long been remarked. To make the ascent of Mont Blanc is equivalent to a journey to Lapland. The limit of vegetation is dependent on that of perpetual snow, and the point of elevation where these snows begin rests upon the mean annual temperature of the country. In the Andes, it reaches about five thousand yards; on the southern slopes of the Himalaya, nearly six thousand; in Switzerland, about three thousand; and in the sixty-fifth degree of latitude, no more than two thousand.

The extreme dryness of such high regions, and the burning heat of the sun, sometimes produce the same effects as a long season of frosty weather; in this manner many species are arrested in their propagation by a cause exactly inverse to that which brings death to the majority of plants on the summit of mountains, and indeed perpetual snow alone cannot be regarded as an insurmountable obstacle to vegetable life. There are a very few plants which can live in it; a saxifrage in the Andes, called after the celebrated traveller and chemist Boussingault, is found on rocks six hundred feet above the snow-level. In the Alps, on Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, vegetation does not disappear for more than three times this height; there a few saxifrages, a gentian, a ranunculus, and a chrysanthemum may be seen with their attenuated stems. Around the glaciers, wherever a space is free from snow, or a rift in the rocks furnishes a shelter against the strong frosts, mosses and lichens cover the bare cold stone with a green carpet; the latter of these rise to considerable heights, and are numerous, whilst the mosses scarcely pass over the limit of the last ferns.

In the Himalaya, vegetation is much more active at such great heights, and the striking analogy between these regions and arctic countries is more marked. The spring commences very late, but a few weeks of heat suffice for the plant to accomplish the various phases of its annual

evolution, and though flowering much later than in the warm damp valley, the seeds are formed long before those of its lower neighbour. Hooker observed this in his exploration of the Sikkim, a province in the southern part of the Himalaya. There is then for vegetable life a real calorific capacity; their period of growth does not depend solely on the mean temperature, but on the amount of available heat that they receive.

There are, however, in these regions variations of position and of the configuration of the earth which prevent the regular effects of our observations being fully established. In the Alps, M. Schlagintweit, who has carried these studies out very fully, has remarked that nothing is the same except the pressure of the air. There are decided differences as to the hygrometric state and the temperature from whence very marked contrasts arise; and it is impossible to assign an absolute limit to trees and plants, necessarily submitting to such variable conditions.

He has particularly remarked the trunks of pine trees, firs, and larches, with others which characterise the vegetation of mountains, and belong to the family of Conifere. Taking as a measure the ligneous rings which each year increase the diameter of the trunk, and from which the age of the tree may be calculated, it is perceived that the thickness varies in species, but generally diminishes as the tree grows. This is especially in the second period of the life of the tree, from one to two hundred years, because at these great heights the vegetative force exhausts itself more rapidly, and the period of old age begins earlier. In the valleys, during the second century, the ring still preserves the same, or even has a greater thickness than in the first. This growth has everywhere its fluctuations, depending on the mean temperature of any season. If it be examined every ten years, the inequality is marked; but if from century to century, the equality is the same, until vitality ceases, owing to old age. Thus, in a period of fifty years, each atmospheric change has taken place which can accelerate or lessen vegetation; and the perturbations which make persons think that the seasons are changing, are reproduced in nearly the same order, and a tolerably safe opinion may be given as to the decrease of growth in trees living on mountains.

Besides these modifications, the nature of the soil must be considered, and especially of the rocks. Some plants only grow on crystalline or primitive blocks; others on calcareous or schistous formations. There are kinds of vegetation which so especially attach themselves to certain rocks, that the appearance of the plants reveals the underlying surface. There are special forms, too, of rocks, making terraces, buttresses, *aiguilles*, or cones, on which particular systems of spontaneous vegetation burst forth. According to the nature of the rock, water distributes itself in a proportion which exerts an influence, not only on the species, but on the duration of the life of the plant, the brilliancy of its flowers, and the strength of the stem. Thus, the flora of calcareous rocks, and ground strewn with stone boulders, give birth to more slender forms than the same flora in the meadows; and the plants belonging to the carbonate of lime in the plains dry up more quickly than those growing on schist or slaty formations. Water, indeed, penetrates so unequally into the soil that

it may either wash away or encourage vegetation, according as it falls in abundance or in excess. The violence of the storms to which certain chains are exposed explains the arrested vegetation often observed on isolated peaks: rain runs down the side, instead of refreshing the soil. In the Alps it forms those unexpected swellings of torrents known under the name of *runsen*, which are more feared than storms or avalanches; the swollen streams precipitate themselves with the noise of thunder, and that which in summer was but a simple thread of water takes the proportions of an immense cataract. When moisture is to be really beneficial it must filter through the soil in small quantities, where it can be received on a bed of verdure or layers of leaves and moss, distributing it slowly, and arresting these violent floods.

Leaving the distribution of plants, and turning to that of animal life, we see that water is as necessary to it as to plants; but it has the power of seeking it in the torrents and on the edge of the glaciers; by moving, too, it is possible for it to avoid those extremes of temperature from which plants suffer. Thus animals are often found in higher regions; but the herbivorous species are obliged at times to descend towards the zone which will afford them a subsistence. The chamois, the boldest and most agile of the visitors to Alpine summits, never passes above three or four thousand yards; the wild goat does not venture so high; the fox sometimes goes as far in pursuit of the snow-hen, but the bear shews himself still more rarely. The winter dwelling of the marmot is often more than eight thousand feet high, whilst the frog never passes the snow-line, nor do the lizards and vipers. As to fishes, though they are found in abundance in the lakes and streams, the coldness of the water is for them an obstacle analogous to a low state of the temperature for terrestrial animals. The trout is almost the only fish that can exist in the icy waters; owing to the ease with which it leaps such enormous distances, it can mount the cataracts and overcome difficulties which arrest other swimmers. Two varieties, that of the torrents—*Salmo fario*, and the red trout, *Salmo salvelinus*—are met with on the St Gothard, six thousand four hundred feet high, in the little Lake of Luzendro; still higher the perpetual freezing of the water absolutely forbids their existence, and on the Great St Bernard, in a lake of seven thousand five hundred feet high, no trace can be found of their presence.

The birds are the natural denizens of the highest altitudes. In the Andes the condor, in the Alps the eagle and the vulture, hover over the gigantic peaks. Organised as they are for the longest flights, they are the true sailors of the atmospheric ocean, as the petrels are of the Atlantic. The chouca, a kind of intensely black raven, with a yellow beak and bright red claws, does not rise so high in the air, but is essentially the bird of high peaks and snowy regions. It has been seen on the summit of Monte Rosa and the Col du Géant. Flights of them are found in the broken rocks of the mountains, or scudding along the steepest precipices, uttering their harsh croaking note. Everything that rises to a dizzy height in the air has a particular charm for these birds: tall firs, steeples, old towers, the battlements of castles overlooking the valleys, cathedral pinnacles, isolated peaks, and sharp-pointed *aiguilles*, are the

places chosen for their nests. Real hermits of the air, condemned, like those of the desert of Thebes, to the most frugal and austere food, they delight in solitude, and the more space that separates them from man the more they are pleased.

But there are more graceful birds that reside in these frosty regions and animate the cold landscape. The snow chaffinch, *Fringilla nivalis*, loves them so well that it rarely descends to the forest belt. The *accenteur* of the Alps follows it, preferring the stony sterile region between the line of vegetation and that of perpetual snow, both of them seeking their insect food at the height of three or four thousand yards. There are some kinds which rarely use their wings: these are the gallinaceous fowls. The galopede, or snow-hen, is seen in Iceland as well as Switzerland; it flies far above the frosty belt, and lives in very high latitudes, its plumage in winter taking the hue of the snow, in which it loves to be. It is indeed so necessary to its comfort that at the approach of summer it rises higher in the mountains; it burrows and rolls in it with delight, and hollows holes to shelter itself from the wind, which seems to be the only discomfort that it fears in its icy abode. The lichens and seeds carried by the wind suffice for its nourishment, whilst its young are fed on the insects it catches.

Insects are indeed the principal living beings in these desolate regions; a fresh analogy with the polar regions, where, during the short weeks of summer, they appear in great numbers. In the cold temperate zone, beetles present themselves in greater numbers and greater variety than in any region excepting near the equator. They predominate in Alpine heights, reaching on the southern side three thousand yards, and somewhat less on the northern. There, concealed in holes and cracks in the rock, they live on flesh, for vegetable nourishment is almost absent. Their wings are so short that they can scarcely be discerned; nature seeming to wish to shelter them from the great currents of air which would else infallibly carry them away. In fact, other flies and insects, like butterflies, are continually found to have been raised by the wind to these heights, and have perished in the snow. The glaciers are covered by victims that have thus met their fate; their frail corpses strewing the ice in thousands. Yet there are certain kinds which brave the cold, and rise freely to some thousand yards, since Hooker observed butterflies on the top of Mont Mornay. The spiders have also the power of resisting the cold; and an almost microscopic insect, the *Desoria glacialis*, lives only on the borders of the glaciers. But the sadness of their home seems to be reflected in all these little creatures; they no longer present the variety of tints which characterise them elsewhere, being of a dark or black hue, which hides their presence in the holes where they creep. Their habits also are modified according to the locality; nocturnal insects in the countries of the plain become diurnal in mountainous regions, as it is certain that the conditions of the lowlands during the night are reproduced here in the day, preserving even after sunrise the shadow and freshness unknown below.

Such is the picture which naturalists give us of animal life in those zones where the fauna gradually give way to solitude and desolation. Beyond the last stage of vegetation, beyond the extreme

region of insects and mammiferous animals, all becomes silent and uninhabited; though the air is full of infusoria, microscopic animalcula, which the wind raises like dust, and which are spread in the atmosphere to unknown heights; they are germs floating in space waiting for the moment to fix themselves.

Of the dawn, M. de Tschudi has traced a delicious picture. 'A little before the sky is coloured with the first traces of morning, even before the light breeze announces the approach of day, when the stars are still shining in the firmament, the birds give the signal for nature to awake. A slight rush through the fir-wood, a sort of cooing, the notes of which become more and more accentuated; the rapidity gradually increases and ends in a harmonious chattering, rising and descending from branch to branch, as the bow of the musician passes from the deepest to the highest chords; then suddenly a louder sound is heard, voices at first timid, now intone their characteristic air, their more or less piercing whistle; the sweet melancholy nocturne has ceased; it is a morning serenade, that the winged tribe gives to the sun, which is on his way to warm their humid abode.'

Man has been less favoured than the birds; we may long for this aërian existence, where the eye rests on the magnificent panorama of mountains and on the deep blue of the firmament. But to climb to a great height is always a painful thing; either the air contains less oxygen in a given volume, and the dissolution of this gas in the blood operates with more difficulty under a weaker pressure, or the repeated movements of the ascent fatigue the muscular system; certain it is that the pulse is painfully accelerated; there is a difficulty of breathing; headache, nausea, and many other sensations known under the name of *mal de montagnes*, are felt. The real cause of this pathological phenomenon has been much discussed; it arises probably from the different pressure of the air. Man has not been organised like the birds, to rise through layers of a varying density; the latter are provided with bags of air communicating with the lungs and bones, filling up a large part of their bodies, and constituting a kind of breathing-pump. A similar arrangement is found in insects; they are provided with tracheæ, leading to the outer air by stigmata, which can be opened and shut at pleasure; thus, they have the faculty of resisting the influence of a pneumatic vacuum of deleterious gases, and even of immersion in water.

The annoyance that is felt in ascending a mountain may, however, be overcome; the change is often too sudden, and a certain lapse of time is necessary to establish an equilibrium between the gas in the blood and that of the exterior, so that the lungs may absorb the right quantity of oxygen. Man may be acclimatised to great heights, just as he can be to hot, damp, or cold climates. The city of Quito, standing nine thousand feet above the level of the sea, has a large population, who never seem to suffer from the altitude; Potosí, another town in the Andes, is thirteen thousand feet high. After De Saussure had been a fortnight on the summit of the Alps, his pulse resumed its natural movements; and Boussingault, after a long residence in the towns of the Andes, felt no oppression on the top of Chimborazo.

Still, everything shows that the destiny of our race belongs to low latitudes. It was in warm flat

countries, on the banks of the Euphrates, the Nile, the Indus, the Ganges, and the Hoang-ho, that civilisation was first developed. The first home of man was not like an eagle's nest, but in a fertile garden, watered by four streams; and mountainous regions were long regarded as places of horror and fear; the Greek poets made the dwelling-place of Boreas one of exile and punishment; it was on the summit of the Caucasus that the guilty human race, personified in Prometheus, was chained by the anger of Jupiter. It belongs to modern times to be familiarised with high mountains, and to admire and love them. The Romans were insensible to the beauties of Switzerland; they saw nothing in this part of Gaul but horrible *saltus*, the miserable abode of a people disinherited by destiny. It is only within the last two centuries that Switzerland has been visited by the lovers of the picturesque; we seek vainly in any but modern authors for a description of its beauties; as to nature, no one imagined that it could raise the soul to God.

Yet, in the valleys, man becomes enervated, and there is a perpetual current of people flowing from the highlands to regenerate with more vigorous blood a race that has lost its energy. Thus, when the regions about the Euphrates were falling into precocious senility, the mountaineers of Chaldea came down into Mesopotamia, and ruled there. The Medes, from the southern slope of the Caucasus, played the same part. The invasion of the north of Italy by the Gauls; that of the inhabitants of the mountainous forest regions of Germany into the north of France; the establishment of the Manchous in China; that of the tribes of Central Asia into the plains of the Ganges and Indus, reproduce the same phenomena. In the plains, the human mind reigns alone; in the mountains, it is nature which appears in her turn; and our puny works are crushed into insignificance by the majesty which surrounds us.

THE LAST OF THE PROSERPINE.

IN TWO PARTS.—PART II.

THE receipt of the curt but forcible letter which Gregg had thought proper to send to me left me in a state of perplexity which lasted long. The urgent and renewed appeals to me, on the part of the commander of the *Proserpine*, to renounce my intention of going on with her to New Orleans, might indeed be due to the mere whim of a man half crazed by drink, but then on the other hand the advice might be good and sound. Gregg wished me well; of that I felt assured. I had served him, and he was grateful for such slight kindness as it had been in my power to render to one worse off than myself. Why was he so evidently anxious that I should leave the vessel? Was it that he knew of some peril personal to myself, which would be avoided were I to take my passage down the river by another boat, and if so, why was he not more explicit in stating it? It was plain that the newly appointed skipper of the steamer would not, or could not, speak out frankly to apprise me of the reasons for his enigmatical hints and obvious uneasiness, and therefore I decided that it would be useless to go to him and demand an explanation of the affair.

Besides, of what should I be afraid? I had no enemy, to my knowledge, in all America. The little

cash I carried was not enough to tempt the cupidity of any very dangerous gang of 'sportsmen,' such as sometimes infest a river-boat known to carry specie to a large amount, and few indeed were aware that I had even those few hundreds of dollars about my person. Was Gregg cognisant of Mr Harman's altered sentiments towards me, and did he apprehend some violent quarrel as the sequel of our chance meeting on board the vessel of which my ex-employer was the owner? Scarcely, for Mr Harman and myself had been too well accustomed to the habits of civilised society to resort to knife and pistol, as the swaggering brawlers of San Francisco are apt to do. Or could it be that Gregg's pretended amazement when he saw me at Grand Gulf was a feint to blind me to the fact that he was acting by the orders of Mr Harman, in whose pay he was, and that the merchant having in some manner become acquainted with my intentions, had taken steps to remove from out of his way my distasteful presence? In any case, I determined that I would stand my ground, and would not quit the steamer without better grounds for doing so than I was then conscious of.

We reached Vidalia; but I was not among the two or three passengers who landed there, nor did Gregg attempt to renew his warning. To all appearance he did not even keep watch to see whether I should or not comply with his oracular advice, doing his duty with great vigilance and steadiness, and frequent as were his visits to the drinking-bar, betraying no sign of intoxication. That he was an excellent sailor and well used to the river, I knew; and in case his sobriety did not fail him, I saw little risk of accident, whether from snag, sawyer, or sandbank. Well steered, the boat kept her course smoothly enough; and if I fancied that her old timbers strained and creaked too much under the impetus of the machinery, there was still nothing to cause alarm. The *Proserpine* was a very large boat. Her stowage was considerable; and when I praised the lavish use of decoration, the gilding, painting, mirrors, marbles, and velvet of her freshly adorned saloons, Lysander the sub-steward told me that the best of what was on board was in the hold. 'French goods dey are—all belong Massa Harman—seventy—ninety—hundred thousand dollar!' he declared, rolling his opal eyes with all an African's enjoyment of the imposing sum-total.

The cargo, the captain, and the vessel were all alike puzzles to me. Harman Brothers had, in the period of commercial prosperity that had preceded the war, been chiefly exporters of cotton and importers of the wares and agricultural produce of the North. This was the first time that I had heard of any transactions on the part of the firm in what are technically styled French goods; but, to be sure, the principal had always kept a large part of the business wholly in his own hands, and no clerk was ever consulted on matters outside his own department. At anyrate, Mr Harman must be the best judge of his own affairs; and with this reflection I left the mulatto, whose prattle began to weary me, and went once more on deck. And now, as the day wore on, and evening drew near, I could not but remark that an unusual activity prevailed in the engine-room. The deck hands were constantly at work in carrying down fresh loads of wood to feed the fires, the hoarse roar and ruddy glare of which told that the furnace-heat must be very considerable. Once and again the head-engineer came up the

ladder to exchange a few words, in a subdued tone, as if of respectful remonstrance, with Gregg; but after each of these interviews the efforts to get up a fuller head of steam were redoubled. The aged vessel groaned and shivered in every timber as the machinery worked faster and faster, and the wash occasioned by our rapid passage increased, until we seemed to be chased by a long line of tawny billows.

Still, none of the passengers, so far as I could see, evinced the smallest anxiety as to the unnecessary speed of the steamer. Going at hap-hazard pace is so habitual in American travel, and suits so well with the national ways of thought, that caution is apt to be voted effete. When I ventured to remark to one fellow-voyager, a bearded Missourian, who stood beside me, looking across at the deep woods on one bank and the trim plantations on the other shore, lying level and dim behind the protecting 'levee,' that the engines were working dangerously fast, considering the age of the boat and the approaching darkness, he carelessly made answer: 'Guess we'll be all the sooner at New Orleans, squire. Let her rip!' And with this proverbial expression of social philosophy, he turned away. On we went, while night crept in upon us, and from the swampy shore and the mud flats of the river there arose a dense white mist, that mingled with the long gray Spanish moss which hung in fantastic pendants, like the hoary beards and streaming hair of an army of giants, from the primeval trees of the Louisiana shore. The long sad cry of the whip-poor-will was quickly answered by the whoop of the owl and the whirring wings of the bats, while the shrill and mournful howls of wild animals arose at intervals from the tangled forest. There seemed to be an awakening, as day died out, of the birds and beasts that only leave their lairs under the shadow of night; but of man and his works nothing was visible except the white gleam of the embankment that kept out the waters from the cultivated land. I was glad when the wan moon, not yet half full, threw her silvery gleam upon the sullen river, above which the mist hung like a giant veil.

Seldom before, in a life that had not been wholly unadventurous, had I felt the same dull sense of a shapeless peril near at hand, against which it behoved me to guard. And yet what risk could there be, unless from the reckless hurry with which the fire was heaped with fuel, and the steamer forced along; and I had been too often in Mississippi boats madly racing in the struggle to be the first at some given point of arrival, to apprehend much danger on that score, if only no collision should occur. Captain Gregg, who still avoided me, was unremitting in the discharge of his duty, and the *Proserpine* dashed on, under careful steering, unharmed by the floating timber that here and there specked the surface of the flood, or the more formidable obstruction of the sunken trees, firmly imbedded in the mud of the shallows, and whose jagged and spear-like heads protruding from the water have proved fatal to many a craft.

'Hist! just stop where you are, master, for a minit,' said a deep voice, lowered to a hoarse whisper, in my ear: 'don't pay attention now, but keep still, and I'll be back in a jiffy. The skipper has eyes like a cat's.'

The voice and the words alike sounded strangely to me, but two or three of the firemen and deck-hands were passing near me at the time, staggering

under their burdens of fuel to replenish the greedy fires below, and one of them must have been the speaker. Mechanically complying with the advice of my unknown friend, I remained quietly where I was, feigning unconsciousness, and leaning on the bulwark, continued to watch the evening stars peeping with their tremulous lustre through the shimmering haze, and the cold gleam of the white moonlight on the turbid river. The captain, who had been standing at no great distance from me, soon moved away, and in another minute a stealthy figure came creeping among the bales and hencoops, as a lizard crawls among the stones, and stood at my side. By the dim light I could see that he was one of the crew, a wiry little man, with crisp gray hair curling under his tattered straw-hat, but who had an unmistakable air of seamanhood about him, in spite of his dirty jacket of butternut-coloured homespun. Deck-hands of a Mississippi steamer are usually a miscellaneous collection of waifs and strays, Germans and Irish predominating, and there was something singular in finding a genuine sailor in such a position.

'All right, sir. Mr Alfred—my eyes are better nor yours, old as I am'—said the intruder, very cautiously; 'or else, which is likely, your face is less altered than that of Sam Kentish'—

Kentish! Sam Kentish! the name, long forgotten, had once been very familiar to me, and the mention of it brought back the confused memories of things, and persons, and places in the dim past.

'You ain't forgotten me?' rejoined the old fellow in a tone of reproach. 'I taught you to row, and to steer, and to reef a sail when half a capfull was blowin', fresh in from south-west-by-west, off the Needles onder, aboard his honour's yacht.'

'On board my uncle's yacht,' said I eagerly. 'Of course I remember you now, Sam; and I am glad to see an old friend again; but how on earth'—

'How did I come to be here?' interrupted the seaman; 'and how, too, did I come to be the broken-down, old, worthless waister I am? Well, it is a long story, master, and I've neither time nor taste to spin much of a yarn. I went to the bad, never mind why, and that's the long and the short of it, lost my character as a yacht's blue-jacket, shipped foreign, knocked about for years in the China seas and off the Guinea coast—no matter where, so as rum was plenty and wages high—then was a man-o'-war's-man, and got my three dozen for drunkenness and desertion; and next came down to coasters in the Antilles, and then to this. My own fault, partly, I daresay; but never mind that now. Your uncle, his honour the general, had a sort of regard for me, you may remember, sir'—

'And you deserved it, I am sure, Sam,' I answered kindly, as I looked down on the wreck of what had once been as fine a sailor as ever hauled at a rope, and who had seemed to me when, as a boy, I had had the occasional treat of a cruise in my uncle's small yacht, a perfect treasury of accomplishments.

'I think I did, sir,' said Sam, shaking his head sorrowfully; 'but the blackguard must have been precious strong in me all the time, or it isn't here I'd end my days, among a parcel of ruffs that don't know stem from stern. Well, Mr Alfred, I didn't come here to whimper, but to say a word in season to the nephew of my kind old master, his honour. There's worse nor me aboard; another chap of the same kidney, but twice as bad.'

'You mean Gregg the captain?' said I, as my heart beat fast and thickly.

'Ay, ay!' returned the seaman, in studiously low tones; 'I mean him, and no other. I've sailed with him, and I know the stuff he's made of, and when he means mischief. He means it now; I can read it in his eye, plain as print; and— Hark ye, mister—do you think it was wood we carried down last to feed the fires?'

'I suppose so,' returned I, in surprise.

'No, sir,' said Sam drily; 'it was a load of hams, prime Kentucky, and as fat bacon as ever came out of Tennessee. The fires are that hot the stokers hardly dare open the iron doors, and the engines are straining, so that two niggers keep throwing water to cool the bearings. That's not all, for besides the loafing lubbers we carry for deck-hands, there are six seafaring men—two former shipmates of mine among 'em—chaps better known than trusted—and their orders are to keep together, and be ready to man a boat.'

'To man a boat?' said I, greatly perplexed.

'Yes,' answered Sam Kentish, with an impatient jerk of the head, as if my dulness annoyed him; 'that boat up yonder, to starboard, swinging in the tackles. Right as a trivet she is, with the oars in her, and quite clear of poultry and lumber. The other two boats,' he added in a whisper, 'are littered with coops and awnings and what not, and what's more—the plugs are out!'

'The plugs out!' said I, hardly able to believe my ears: 'for what purpose?'

'Ax no questions, Mr Alfred,' replied my informant. 'I only know this—one of the sailors whispered to me, he did: "Old Sam, you've been my shipmate, so I'll tell you this: keep your weather-eye open, and in case of anything happening"—he didn't say what—"jump into the starboard boat, and be cockswain." I give the office to you—for old days' sake, Mr Alfred.'

'But Gregg?' returned I, bewildered.

'Gregg would not leave much of the roof on my skull if he guessed what I've been saying,' rejoined the old man. 'Now I must go about my duty; but hark ye, Mr Alfred, if you think what I tell you all moonshine, and that we are cracking on for no reason, just'—dropping his voice—'go and look at the steam-gauge!' And he was gone.

I stood for a few moments with my brain in a perfect whirl of conflicting thoughts. The repeated warnings which I had received, the ominous signs that mischief of some kind was brewing, which had attended my voyage in the *Proserpine*, crowded in upon me with a force that compelled conviction. Gregg was a bold and unscrupulous man, as I well knew, and it might well be that his designs were of a nature to harmonise with his own character; but then what could be his object in this instance? and why had Mr Harman been so strangely imprudent as to confide his valuable property, to say nothing of himself and his only child, to such a vessel commanded by such a captain? To explain these incongruities seemed hopeless.

'Whereabouts are we?' I asked of one of the crew, just relieved from his spell of work as helmsman.

'Half-way between Natchez and the Grande Coupée,' he made answer. 'The light you see on the west bank is Three Island Point, and we shall sight Calumet Island and St Anthony village in

half an hour or less, at our rate of going; that's about it, mister.'

I went down to the cabin, and consulted a chart of the Mississippi, on a large scale, that hung on the panelled wall. Yes, there were the places named; while between the Point and Calumet Island a jagged line of dots indicated the Banc des Moines, a dangerous shoal, the scene of many a catastrophe, and which had gained its name, tradition averred, from the drowning of a boatload of missionary monks in the reign of Louis XIV.

I quitted the cabin and hurried at once to examine the steam-gauge; but it had been broken, 'by accident,' as a scowling boatman in a red shirt gruffly assured me. No doubt it had been deemed expedient to prevent that useful register of the pressure at which the steam was applied from being readily accessible to prying eyes. My next care was to visit the boats. That to starboard was, as Sam had correctly stated, in perfect order, the oars shipped, and ready for instant use. The others were littered with miscellaneous objects, huddled together with seeming carelessness; and by the dim light I found it no easy matter to verify the information which had been given me. At last, however, by groping with my ungloved hand among the rubbish, I succeeded in ascertaining that the old sailor had told the truth. *The plugs were out.* My worst suspicions were thus confirmed. I was face to face with base, cruel treachery, and all our lives hung as it were by a thread. A tumult of feelings assailed me, and I grew hot and cold by turns, as the cruel truth forced itself upon me; but it was no unmanly fear that I experienced. The thought of my own peril was all but swallowed up in my anxiety for her whom I loved so well. Alice in danger of what I knew not—Alice on board this ill-omened vessel, under the guidance of such an unprincipled dare-devil as Captain Gregg! I could now fathom this man's eagerness to prevent me from embarking. Doubtless, some caprice of gratitude towards myself had made him reluctant that I should be involved in the general doom, whatever it might be, of the unlucky voyagers on board the *Proserpine*.

Yet, with the weight of this apprehension upon me, I found it hard indeed to decide on the proper course to pursue. Should I go frankly to Mr Harman, apprise him of the character of his captain, state the whole train of suspicious circumstances, and demand an immediate inquiry into Gregg's conduct? There was every chance that the old merchant would misconstrue my motives, and refuse to credit my assertions. Would it be better to assemble the more able-bodied of the male passengers, reveal all I knew, and if necessary, take forcible possession of the ship? Had I been alone, I might have adopted this alternative, hazardous as it was; but I shrank from the idea of exposing Alice to unnecessary risk, and I well knew that if I denounced Gregg openly, bloodshed, in that wild region, was certain to follow, to whichever side victory might incline. The perfidious captain of the steamer was brave enough, and the desperadoes whom he had purposely mingled among the crew would of course sustain their leader, while I could not say what auxiliaries might at any moment paddle forth from creek or bay to co-operate in the plunder of the richly laden vessel. The Mississippi pirates had been sorely thinned by the rough-and-ready justice of Regulators' Courts, but there was still existing

in the decaying townships of the Cotton States a residuum of scoundrelism ripe for any violence that promised great gains quickly made.

To speak to Gregg himself would possibly be the wisest plan. The man's heart was not, as I fancied, entirely hardened, and I thought that I had that morning observed signs of his being secretly averse to the evil work in which he was engaged. If his blood were once up, he would probably cast all scruples of conscience to the winds, but it was perhaps not wholly hopeless to appeal quietly to his better feelings. And yet should I fail, I should very likely have precipitated the very misfortunes against which I sought to guard. What was that dark figure standing beside the helmsman?—Gregg himself; and surely this must be the chief-engineer again coming from the neighbourhood of his fires to confer with the steamer's commander. Half unconsciously, I drew near, and my ears caught the last words, spoken imperatively, and as if to put an end to the discussion, with which Gregg dismissed his subordinate: 'Old woman's nonsense, Mr Beale, I tell you. Crack on!'

'It's off my shoulders anyhow,' muttered the engineer beneath his clenched teeth, as he passed me; and the furious force with which the huge engines drove us along, making the old craft reel and tremble at every giant pulsation, furnished an eloquent commentary to his words. Gregg now stooped, and gave some orders to the helmsman, speaking in a low voice. 'Ay, ay, sir,' answered the man. Gregg turned, and I caught a glimpse of his pale, fearfully resolute face. His mouth looked as firmly set as if the lips had been of steel, and there was a wicked gleam in his eyes. So intent was he in looking out into the night, that he did not observe my approach until I was quite close to him. Then indeed he started, and as our eyes met he seemed to divine my thoughts.

'You clear out!' he said, with a suppressed fierceness that boded no good, and thrusting his hand as he spoke into the breast of his coat. 'I gave you your choice, Britisher! What! You've been spying, have you? Better keep a quiet tongue, for fear I should be tempted to remember the old proverb, Dead men tell no tales.' And I heard the quick low clicking of a pistol's lock as he glared upon me.

'Broken water, forward there!' sang out the voice of the look-out man at the bow. 'Breakers ahead!' 'Reverse the engines!' 'Stop her, for heaven's sake!' 'We are on the Moines!' cried half-a-dozen of the terror-stricken passengers, whom the sultry heat of the saloons had tempted to remain on the breezy deck. I looked eagerly out, and could plainly see the long curved line of white foam ahead of us.

'Down helm!' thundered Gregg, and the scared steersman obeyed the fatal order, the execution of which was followed by an outcry of half-incredulous horror and dismay from the affrighted passengers as on we went, rushing upon the reef at the full speed of our maddened course. An instant more, and with a crash and a shock that threw most of us from our feet, the steamer grounded on the shoal, heeling over as she did so, while spars, side-rails, and paddle-boxes cracked and splintered like reeds in a whirlwind. The screams of women, the oaths and outcries of men, made the scene a very babel of confusion.

Conspicuous among a group of passengers on the hurricane-deck were Mr Harman and his daughter;

the latter of whom, in evident terror, clung to her father's arm. I sprang towards her, difficult as it was to tread the slippery slope of the deck, over which the waves of the Mississippi now broke, as if the wrecked vessel had been but a dam exposed to the fury of the current. The clamours that reached my ears as I made my way onwards were significant enough.

'She's going down.' 'The ship's settling in the water.' 'She's stove in, fore and aft.' 'The boats—the boats!'

'This way, this way!' exclaimed I, offering my hand to Alice as she stumbled in the effort to traverse the reeling deck.—'Pardon me, Mr Harman, but this is no time for ceremony.' The old merchant angrily repulsed me. 'We need none of your assistance, sir,' he said, in a high harsh voice. 'Miss Harman is with her father, and requires no other protector. Let me pass, sir.' And he pressed on, supporting Alice, who seemed half-fainting, and approached the place where the starboard boat was being lowered over the steamer's side by half-a-dozen stalwart fellows of unmistakably salt-water aspect. Several of the crew, with a number of the frightened passengers, now tried to crowd into the boat, the rather that the steamer rolled beneath us, and careened as if going down bodily. Gregg, who seemed quite cool, drove them back again. The other boats, he said, would be manned and lowered immediately.

Courage and self-assertion seldom fail in a moment of supreme danger to enforce submission, and the mob of terrified creatures made a rush in the direction of the other boats, which had been wilfully rendered useless, while Gregg and his confederates profited by the opportunity to lower away the starboard cutter, into which they quickly sprang, while Mr Harman and his daughter were hurried over the side. 'Now, sir!' whispered old Sam as he nimbly swung himself into the stern-sheets, and, unbidden, grasped the tiller-ropes. 'Alfred! Alfred!' cried Alice, breaking silence for the first time, and looking up at me with her innocent eyes dilated by terror, as she was placed in the boat, 'come with us.'

'Push off!' ordered Gregg, as the foaming water broke over the gunwale, and the men grasped their oars: 'we've room for no more.'

But by this time the fact that the other boats were unserviceable had been discovered, and the crowd of passengers, firemen, and deck-hands came rushing wildly to the side, eagerly imploring the captain to save them. The shrieks, prayers, and entreaties of the females mingled with passionate exclamations of the men, several of whom did not hesitate to accuse the commander of the *Proserpine* of treachery. Gregg, however, mocked at all entreaties, and pushed off. I was now violently flung forwards, and found myself struggling for life in the frothing, tumbling water, the centre, so it seemed, of a chaotic mass of torn wood-work and rent iron, of splintered beams, miscellaneous rubbish, empty casks, loose oars, and whatever was light enough to float; while mixed with the wreck were human forms, some clinging to pieces of timber, some hopelessly entangled in the ruins of what had been the shapely vessel. I knew by the destruction around me that the *Proserpine* had burst her boiler, and that death in its ghastliest shapes was busy with all around.

It was a dreadful moment, crowding as it did

into its brief compass sights and sounds of horror. Bruised and all but stunned by the blows of the pieces of woodwork which drifted against me as I swam, I twice incurred more imminent risk, as I felt the clutch of some drowning wretch tighten upon me, and threaten to drag me down. But the grasp relaxed, and I found myself in open water, and could draw breath again, and look around. A sad and terrible spectacle it was on which the wan white moon looked down. There were the breakers chafing on the shoal, the broad stretch of turbid river, the confused mass of the wreck, whence proceeded moans and cries that grew gradually more feeble, as victim after victim sank beneath the rushing water. What was that, full in the silvery track of the moonlight? A boat, surely, bottom upwards, and near it, clinging to a half-submerged oar, a slender figure, just visible. I thought I recognised the light-coloured muslin dress that Alice wore, as it floated up to the surface; and without an instant's delay I struck out for the spot. I am a strong swimmer, but it was all that I could do, by straining every nerve, to make head against the force of the stream, and it was by extreme exertion that at last, spent and breathless, I reached the sinking girl and drew her towards the boat. My hand slipped from its hold the first time as I tried to grasp the keel, but a second effort succeeded, and then I felt that we were safe.

'You are not hurt?' asked I eagerly, as I assisted Alice to obtain a firm hold of the drifting boat. 'Not hurt? But what is this?' I continued in alarm, for the blood was trickling freely from the soft white wrist that I grasped.

'It is nothing,' she answered earnestly; 'a mere scratch. But, Alfred, my father, my poor father, he, I fear, is badly injured, for I heard his voice calling for help as if in pain, as I was washed away.'

At this instant I felt firm ground beneath my feet, and, to my great joy, I perceived that the boat had floated into shallow water on the verge of the shoal. We scrambled as best we could upon the sloping shelf of the sandbank, where the boat stuck fast, while the swift current flowed frothing and bubbling down the channel beyond. We were now in comparative security; but I had not the heart to refuse the piteous entreaties of Alice that I would save her father; and bidding her keep up her courage, and enjoining her on no account to allow the boat to be drifted off into the stream, I plunged again into the seething water, and made for the wreck. Well did I know that I was risking my own life to save that of one who had no claim on me; but the thoughts of Alice in her grief nerved my arm, and after a hard struggle I reached the place where the shattered fragments of the *Proserpine* were yet beating on the bar.

'Wall done, mister,' said a harsh voice, that of the gaunt Missourian to whom I had previously confided my apprehensions as to the result of the steamer's headlong speed. 'You're in the nick of time to bear a hand. The nigger and me have done what we could to rig up a raft and save one or two of the poor wounded critters, but we're most wore out, bein' no swimmers, at that.'

And true enough I found that the speaker, aided by my friend Lysander, had contrived to lash together four or five hencoops and pieces of light wood, on which were supported the helpless forms of three of the wounded passengers. One of these, apparently in a dying state, was a woman, but the

other two were men, and I at once knew one of the two to be old Mr Harman. As I bent over him he muttered feebly: 'Leave me—let me die—I deserve'—And then ceased to speak.

In a few hurried words I explained to the Missourian the position of the boat, and where I had left Alice. To pilot the frail raft to that part of the shoal would be a work of much difficulty and danger, yet it offered our best chance of safety. Accordingly, we pushed boldly off into the stream, and after a long and arduous struggle succeeded in touching shore near the point where Alice stood. The combined strength of the Missourian, of the mulatto, and myself just sufficed to right the boat; and then, as we were lifting in the ghastly load of the poor wounded, a strange faintness came over me; there was a buzzing in my ears as if I had been in the centre of a swarm of bees, and I sank helplessly down at the bottom of the boat. When I regained my senses, it was broad daylight; I was lying on a mattress in a mean room, the rafted roof and wattled walls of which told that I was in the dwelling of some settler in that wild region; while beside me, with my wrist clasped in the professional gripe of his bony fingers, stood the tall Missourian, looking down upon me with a friendly smile.

'I'm a doctor, colonel,' he said good-naturedly, 'although I daresay you never guessed it. I grant you that Cyrus Cass, M.D. in his red shirt and buff'ler boots don't look a gen-teel practitioner; but for splicing a broken bone or healing a knife-wound, I fancy this coon could hold his own with surgeons that wouldn't drink a brandy-smash in his company. I kinder take to you, youngster. You saved all our lives, but you got a nasty knock or two in doing it, and I was most 'fraid I'd have to trepan you yesterday; but your head must be plaguy hard, and that's the fact.'

I smiled feebly at this ambiguous compliment, and, lifting my hand to my head, which felt heavy, and hung listlessly back on the rude pillow stuffed with maize-straw, I was surprised to find that my brows were enveloped in a bandage.

'Twar a bit of floating rail,' the doctor explained, 'that hit you thar, just on the temple, and you were bleeding smart when you set foot on the sandbank, but somehow in the flurry and heat of the business you seemed to feel nothing until we were right with the boat. Then off you went, slick away in the death-swoon, and I believe the poor young lady thought you were cleared off creation, she took on so, pretty thing.'

'You mean Alice—Miss Harman,' I said anxiously. 'Is she?'

'Make your mind easy; she's all right,' said the rough but kindly surgeon; 'tis but an hour ago she said to me: "Yes, doctor, but are you sure he'll live?"—meaning you, squire; and when I answered there was no fear, if you'll believe me, she took my hand and kissed it, she was that pleased!' And the Missourian raised his large brown paw, and contemplated it with a sort of wonder, as if the connection of ideas between his weather-beaten digits and a tender young lady was too inscrutable for the human intellect.

'But her father—Mr Harman?' I faltered out.

The good doctor was manifestly embarrassed. He felt my pulse again, and then blurted out: 'Dead, Mr Mainwaring. He was cruelly hurt, and 'twas a mercy for him to cease to suffer. The poor lady

we picked up is dead too. There's but four alive out of the wreck yonder—you, me, Miss Alice, and the nigger Lysander. The third wounded person we brought ashore, though you didn't know it, war the captain.'

'What! Gregg?' exclaimed I, raising myself on my elbow.

The surgeon nodded. 'Yes, that villain, Paul Merriion Gregg. He just lived long enough—a gashly sight he was, with every rib crushed in—to confess. Mr Harman made a confession too.'

And the doctor placed before my eyes a sheet of paper, on which were traced, in feeble characters, such as a dying man's hand might pen, but in the well-known handwriting of my former employer: 'Too late—ask—forgive—treat Alice well—my full consent—when her husband—make restitution—goods—insured—fraud—the *Proserpine*—save—good name.' That was all.

'To cut a long story short,' said the surgeon kindly, seeing my bewilderment: 'Mr Harman, who was, you know, as proud as Lucifer, was in pecuniary difficulties, and saw no honest way out of them. By ill luck he fell in with Gregg, and the two between them concocted the precious scheme that has nearly made a finish of us all. The old *Proserpine* was bought, vamped up, and laden with a worthless cargo of damaged goods, which were insured for an enormous amount, as really valuable property; while the plan was, that Gregg was to get the steamer cast away on the Banc des Moines, when the insurance companies would be cheated out of enough to keep the old firm above water. Mr Harman was aboard with his daughter—I needn't say she knew no more of the plot than seraphs did—to disarm suspicion; and they were to be landed safe, and all strangers left to chance it, to heighten the horror of the shipwreck; but the boiler burst when the engines ceased working, and the pair of accomplices were caught in their own trap. The old man repented before he died; and if you want to hear more, here is Miss Alice herself.'

Alice it was, careworn, pale, and sad, but with hope and love ineffable in her pure eyes, as she bent over me, and her tears fell upon my face.

'Live for me, dear Alfred,' she said simply; 'we shall be poor—but I will be a true wife to you, if you will have me, dear. I have no one left now but you.'

My story is told. I have for years been happy as the husband of Alice; and although the debts of the firm were heavy, and to do justice to the defrauded insurance companies was, of course, my first duty, I have found means, by hard and honest work, to keep the credit of the firm intact, and do not yet despond of seeing Harman Brothers, like a phoenix, revive to somewhat of its old prosperity.

THE POEMS OF A PROSE-WRITER.

THE poetry of prose-writers is a theme upon which much might be written both to inform and to amuse. Some excellent prose-writers will have it that their *forte* is verse, just as Liston persuaded himself (but no one else) that his strong point was the delineation of tragic passion; some are equally good (like Southey) at both prose and verse, though of these it must be added that they are seldom in the first class of writers; while others, again,

unhappily, are equally bad at what Jerrold called 'prose and worse.' That the majority of good prose-writers have, at some time in their lives at least, cultivated the muse, is certain, though they sometimes wish that their early efforts in that way might be buried in oblivion. It will be news to most of our readers, for instance, that among the earliest productions of Harriet Martineau are two volumes of devotional poetry; yet such is the fact. Charlotte Brontë, Emerson, Carlyle, have all written poems, and in them are to be traced these common peculiarities: their imagery is not redundant; they do not describe emotions, but all is more or less of fact; and their style is objective—what they sing of is independent of the characteristics of the singer; they do not look at life through glasses so much tinted with their own feelings, as poets use.

This, we think, is invariably to be noticed in the poetry of prose-writers; and another proof of it is recently afforded us by the volume modestly entitled *Rhymes*,* by the popular author of *A Londoner's Walk to the Land's End*. If any one expects to find, in the verses of this sober pedestrian, lyrics in praise of wine or women, passionate outbursts of Byronic spleen, or speculations upon the immortality of the soul, he will be disappointed. It would be just as reasonable, if you met Mr Walter White on one of his walking tours, to be vexed because he could not favour you with the loan of a bassoon out of his knapsack. His muse is practical, and evinces 'a saving common-sense' most unusual in muses. What strikes us as particularly wholesome in him, and a sign that he is no mere tinkling balladmonger, is, that his themes are chosen not from the classical mythologies, but from modern times and everyday life—which have, in truth, as much true poetry in them as any age of mankind. The Electric Telegraph is for him a lyre (not spelt l-i-a-r, as it often is for many of us), upon which he harmoniously plays, not as the wandering wind does, with uncertain, desultory touch, but with sustained force and clearness.

Hark! the warning needles click,
Hither—thither—clear and quick.
Swinging lightly to and fro,
Tidings from afar they shew,
While the patient watcher reads
As the rapid movement leads.
He who guides their speaking play
Stands a thousand miles away.
Sing who will of Orphean lyre,
Ours the wonder-working wire!

Eloquent, though all unheard,
Swiftly speeds the secret word,
Light or dark, or foul or fair,
Still a message prompt to bear:
None can read it on the way,
None its unseen transit stay.
Now it comes in sentence brief,
Now it tells of loss and grief,
Now of sorrow, now of mirth,
Now a wedding, now a birth,
Now of cunning, now of crime,
Now of trade in wane or prime,

* *Rhymes*. By Walter White. Macmillan.

Now of safe or sunken ships,
Now the murderer outstrips,
Now it warns of failing breath,
Strikes or stays the stroke of death.
Sing who will of Orphean lyre,
Ours the wonder-working wire!

Speak the word, and think the thought,
Quick 'tis as with lightning caught,
Over—under—lands or seas,
To the far antipodes.
Now o'er cities thronged with men,
Forest now or lonely glen;
Now where busy Commerce broods,
Now in wildest solitudes;
Now where Christian temples stand,
Now afar in Pagan land.
Here again as soon as gone,
Making all the earth as one.
Moscow speaks at twelve o'clock,
London reads ere noon the shock;
Seems it not a feat sublime,
Intellect hath conquered Time!
Sing who will of Orphean lyre,
Ours the wonder-working wire!

Flash all ignorance away,
Knowledge seeks for freest play;
Flash sincerity of speech,
Noblest aims to all who teach;
Flash till bigotry be dumb,
Deed instead of doctrine come;
Flash to all who truly strive,
Hopes that keep the heart alive;
Flash real sentiments of worth,
Merit claims to rank with Birth;
Flash till Power shall learn the Right,
Flash till Reason conquer Might;
Flash resolve to every mind,
Manhood flash to all mankind.
Sing who will of Orphean lyre,
Ours the wonder-working wire!

Many a man who sees the long, straight wires persistently accompany him for a day's journey, will henceforth regard them, let us hope, with a new interest, having had their magical wonders thus harmoniously described for him, and their uses summed up. That Mr White should succeed in a poem of this description does not surprise us, his *forte* in prose lying in the same direction. But he has also a grace and delicacy of diction—and at times even of feeling—that are more unexpected. The verses, for example, entitled 'My Books,' might have been written by Leigh Hunt himself:

Oh! how sweet when I come home
To see around me many a tome;
Here to revel, there to muse,
Glean or wander as I chuse.
One or two—so seems to me—
Throb with echoes from the sea;
And in some my sense perceives
The harmony of forest leaves;
Here is one—a bosom book—
That babbles like a mountain brook;
Another yet is gorgeous, still,
As sunset on a distant hill.
Endless landscapes cross my room,
Fancy-decked in twilight gloom;
Autumn, Winter, Summer, Spring,
Wizard books, ye changeful bring!
Something apt for each emotion,
Love, or gladness, or devotion:
Ye to me, instead of wife,
Instead of child—are second life.

Ye at will give up your knowledge
Such as may befit a college,
Tortured into rigid rules,
Vexed with learning of the schools:
Or ye proffer information
With an easy salutation,
As though meant, with purpose sly,
To put one off till by-and-by,
And leave me, after all endeavour,
In doubt of what is wise and clever.
Some of ye are as a stream
In whose depths rare jewels gleam:
Happy he who kneels to drink
Leaning o'er the steepy brink,
Catching through the current's flow
Flashes from the gems below.

Admonishers of strife and folly,
Cheerers of black melancholy,
Gentle, most persuasive Teachers,
Or authoritative Preachers;
Companions full of life and spirit,
Mentors who some grudge inherit;
Sometimes full of queerest fancies,
Vague as jack-o'-lantern dances:
Other while ye are as prim
As Quakers neat, sedate and trim.
Three or four are jolly fellows
Whom Time fortifies and mellows;
Some make pretensions to be witty,
Others chant a stirring ditty:
Suiting every time and season
With a rhyme or with a reason.

Books beloved, ye are to me
An unretorting family:
Ye for each day's irritation
Always bring a compensation.
How shall sadness come, or gloom,
While ye lie about my room,
Looking down from friendly nooks?
My benison upon ye, Books!

We have all heard of the fatal facility of octosyllabic verse, and it is true that our author chiefly confines himself to that easy metre, and best succeeds when he does so; but 'it is very creditable, let me tell you' (as Dr Johnson said upon a certain occasion), to a prose-writer to succeed as a poet in *any* metre. In his poem entitled 'Erebus and Terror,' however—too long for quotation here—our author has shewn that he knows how to write a ballad which has both simplicity and force. Greatest feat of all, this man of science and pedestrianism has demonstrated that on occasion he can even write verses that have wit in them—in the sonnet entitled 'A Wedding-Breakfast Speech,' spoken on the marriage of Ada Snowdon to William White:

In old times the fairies played wonderful tricks,
Changed maidens to vixens, and men into sticks:
The sticks still survive, as in pulpits we see;
But that vixens are dead, married men all agree.
One Fairy named Hymen still lives and he plays
Such tricks as would fill his old friends with
amazement:
Changes Frost into Summer, and Flint into Steel,
And Hardy to Coward, and Wolfe into Veal.
But his latest achievements all others surpass,
As you will believe when you hear of the lass
Who always was Snowdon by night and by day,
Yet never turned white, did not even look gray;
But Hymen has touched her, and, wonderful sight,
Though no longer Snowdon, she always is White!

If the above is an ordinary specimen of Mr White's wedding-breakfast speeches, he ought to be in

great request as groomsman, for it has both wit, and (what is even better on such occasions) brevity. The whole of his little book is well worth reading.

COFFIN-DWELLINGS.

A FEW weeks ago, an acutely intelligent article appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, under the startling title of 'Unconsidered Murders.' The object aimed at was to shew how people are heedlessly killed by a systematic disregard of the laws of health; the mortality of children in particular being largely promoted by the defective drainage and ventilation of dwellings. All this, however, is just what has been told over and over again; and excepting that Health officers now and then pounce upon and check some flagrant abuse, the world goes on much as usual—the death-rate of a place taking its swing one way or another without any special inquiry. Since the article in question made its appearance, the wife of a London physician, and mother of a family, whom we have the pleasure of being acquainted with, has, by a communication to the *British Medical Journal*, given a short, but rather shocking account of the way in which the inhabitants of Brighton run a fair chance of being quietly disposed of through the scandalously imperfect drainage of their houses. That the evil described should exist in so populous and fashionable a watering-place as Brighton, is certainly remarkable. In the hope of helping to rouse attention to what in fact is as great a sin as that of sending off sailors to be drowned in 'coffin-ships,' we reproduce this lady's graphic statement, regarding what might be called 'coffin-dwellings.'

Upon the recommendation of my medical friends, I sought an improved condition of health by taking "a desirable family residence" at Brighton at the beginning of the present year. Before taking such a step, I made minute inquiries of the house-agent as to the sanitary condition of the neighbourhood in general, and the house I was negotiating about in particular, and was assured there were no cess-pools, the drainage was perfect, and the water-supply safe. Although nothing could be more satisfactory than these assurances, I determined to place the matter in the hands of my friend Mr Rawlinson before taking personal possession of the premises. This soon brought the real state of affairs to light; and it is with a view to warning others that I now give my experiences. We found the arrangement of the neighbourhood to be a cess-pool for every fourth house, although the main drain of the town was conducted along the roadway only a few yards off in front of the houses. In the present case, the cesspool was in my neighbour's backyard, and was innocent of all ventilation, except what found its way into the four houses in connection with it. The waste-pipes in my cisterns were found to be in direct communication with the cesspool, without any check whatever; and as the adjoining houses are all built on the same plan, the water in their cisterns must necessarily be in a contaminated state. Thanks to Mr Rawlinson, the ventilating shaft which was carried to the top of my house ventilates the entire cess-pool, to the benefit of my immediate and unconscious neighbours, although, I am sorry to say, it cannot have the same beneficial effect upon their cisterns, which remain still in direct communication with the evil. Within the last few days I

have observed a most seductive placard at my next-door neighbour's window, to the effect that "a desirable family residence" is to be had by inquiries, &c. Having worked my way behind the scenes, I know for a fact that human life is quite as much endangered by entering upon a residence there as it would be by coming within range of the enemy's guns on the battle-field. In fact, the danger is greater; for in one case we are allured by the signs of peace, while in the other we are openly warned by the signs of danger. The house in question has not only the cesspool at the back, which I have ventilated, but a cesspool in front; and the waste-pipes of the cisterns remain in the condition I have described. A few years ago, a friend of my own took a house in this immediate neighbourhood for his family, and, after losing a child by typhoid fever, discovered the same evils I have found here. I believe we can compel the landlord to remove the evil on a case of typhoid being proved, but not until the mischief happens. Why should we not have it in our power to arrest the architect, and have him tried for culpable homicide? A few examples of that kind, and we should soon have fewer murderers in our path.'

M A R I A N.

CHAPTER V.

"ELLISDEAN, 29th March.

MY DEAR MARIAN—I have just heard from my son Everard the happy news of your engagement to my dear Frank, which I need not say, after our conversation yesterday, has quite surprised and delighted us all."

'Never mind about the surprise, mother,' said Everard, to whom Lady Augusta was beginning to read aloud, with an air of confident satisfaction, her first note to her intended daughter-in-law.

'But we are surprised, Everard. Miss Keir seemed so positive.'

'Well, better not remind her that she was so positive.—But go on.'

'But then I must write my note over again, if I am not to put in about being surprised. Dear Everard, just listen to what I've said. I've made it really so nice and kind; at least I think so.'

"I am sure, after all that I said yesterday, you must understand how pleased we are, and how happy we shall be to welcome you into our family, not only for Frank's sake, but because I have no doubt we shall soon become very fond of each other; and now that it is all settled, you must, my dear Marian, consider me already as your mother, as I know you have had the sad misfortune of losing your own dear parents, and I hope it will not be long before you are really my daughter. Indeed, I am quite impatient, as you know, to see you my dear son's wife."

'I may say that, may I not, Everard?' Lady Augusta asked, somewhat timidly, for she was getting cowed by the critical air with which he was silently listening to her effusion. I know you said the marriage oughtn't to be hurried on until we were quite sure about what Miss—what is her aunt's name? I always forget—what she is to do for her. But, indeed, I can't bear to think of its being put off for long.'

'Um—well—yes, I think you may say that.

Yes, I think that will do. The old lady has as good as promised to give her niece ten thousand pounds on her marriage, and no doubt will keep her word, so there's no reason for delaying the matter. In fact, the sooner everything is arranged the better. We mustn't give Miss Keir time to change her mind again.'

'Do you think Frank is afraid of her changing it?' exclaimed Kate indignantly. 'Oh, surely he hasn't merely teased her into accepting him, whether she cares for him or not! I am certain she does care for him; she looked so utterly wretched yesterday.'

'Of course. I don't mean to imply that she doesn't care for him. No doubt, they are both equally in love at present. But young ladies are whimsical—begging your pardon, my dear Kate—and it's as well to strike when the iron's hot. Once they're married, they'll be as happy a couple, I don't doubt, as could be wished. But Miss Keir seems to be a little fanciful, and it's just possible she might take into her head that this old story of an engagement might be brought forward again, by way of adding to the romance of her position; and if she does that, I wouldn't give much for the chances of her marriage with Frank. As it is, her telling him, as she chose to do, all about this first love-affair, has been rather a fiasco; and though he was full of her goodness and honesty in telling him, and didn't seem to be much afraid of any rival, old or new, still he doesn't like the notion of her having been engaged before.'

'Neither do I,' said Kate. 'Yes, I know it's unreasonable; but still—I'm disappointed. But never mind.—Go on, mamma.'

'You have sent some message to Miss Gilmour, I hope?' said Everard.

'Yes, yes. Stay, my dear; let me read it myself to you. You know I don't like people to see my letters, and you are so particular, Everard,' said poor Lady Augusta, whose spelling sometimes brought her into trouble. 'This is what I've said about her.' She turned with some cunning to the last page of her letter. In reality she had forgotten to say anything about Miss Gilmour in her rejoicing over Marian, and did not wish her son to find out that the message which he had especially charged her to send had been consigned to a postscript.

'Will you give my compliments to your aunt, and say that I hope to have the pleasure of calling at Holly Bank very soon, but am just now confined to the house by a cold which I must have caught at the bazaar yesterday? I hope, my dear, you have not caught cold, for I remember your dress seemed to have got quite wet. Pray, take great care of yourself in these cold winds, which are so apt to make people ill, and dress more warmly when you go out.' (Lady Augusta, warned by a half-dissatisfied look on her son's face, skipped this sentence, which she herself felt might be considered rather interfering in its advice. But she had been seriously bewailing the insufficiency of Marian's dress to Kate and Mrs Everard, much to the satisfaction of the latter.) 'And then, you know, I've spoken about her coming to stay with us, and proposed to send the carriage for her on Tuesday. That reminds me. Will you tell Frank, Everard, to be sure and let me know what day he can come out next week, that I may arrange about that party? And he must get a week's leave at least, for I should like to have some company when Miss

Keir is with us. I shall send out invitations to-morrow. Don't you think I should?'

'Certainly, mother—an excellent idea,' said Everard with unusual heartiness. He was thinking: 'The sooner the engagement is publicly announced, the better. It fixes everything. The ten thousand pounds down can be relied on at least, even if Frank gets no more. Lucky fellow! And he owes something to me for managing that part of the business.'

So Lady Augusta, made still happier by Everard's unwonted praise, sent off her letter to Marian, as well as another more private and unstudied one to Frank, which in process of time Marian read too, and which filled her heart with even more joy than her own letter had caused her. Everard for his part went to talk to his father, and lay before him an elaborate statement, whereby it was made evident that Frank's marriage with Miss Keir made it unnecessary to burden the Ellisdean property for his benefit to any great extent. Kate began to think of possible bridemaids' dresses, and to think, too, of pleasant walks and talks, rides and practising, with the sweet new sister-in-law, whose loving warm little note, in answer to Lady Augusta's, was all that could have been desired. And Mrs Everard thought of the next week's dinner-parties, and of the pleasure of at least eclipsing Miss Keir on these occasions, and overwhelming her by her own fashion and magnificence.

As for Marian, her thoughts were too complex to be easily described, and perhaps it was fortunate, both for Frank and herself, that during this first week of their engagement they met less often, and under greater difficulties than seemed tolerable to either. Before that week was far advanced, Marian had found out that an entirely new set of troubles lay before her, of which no warning had been given her. In a word, her aunt was still dissatisfied, and now there appeared to remain no way of soothing her. She was crosser than usual all the week, but all Marian's efforts failed to extract from her any explanation of the reasons of her crossness. Only once something like the truth came out when Lady Augusta's note was given her to read. Marian had been happy with her note, which was to her like an echo of the kind words, a repetition of the kindly acts which had so won her heart a day or two before. To her surprise, her aunt read it through with a grim, unmoved countenance, and gave it back to her without a word of comment.

'I must answer it, Aunt Sarah,' said Marian hesitatingly, after a pause. 'Lady Augusta asks me to go to Ellisdean.'

'Well, you can go to Ellisdean' (snappishly).

'She speaks of my staying a fortnight.'

'You can stay a month, if you like.'

A silence. Marian had not expected that the permission would be granted so easily; yet something in the indifference of her aunt's tone pained her, and seemed to darken the anticipated pleasure.

'I don't want to stay away long, aunt.'

'Indeed! Why not? However, do as you like. It's your affair. Her ladyship hasn't asked me.'

'O Aunt Sarah, would you have gone? Oh, I wish—' But here the truthful Marian paused. She certainly regretted, now that the omission struck her, that her aunt had not been included in the invitation. But how could she wish that her aunt had been going with her?

'Gone! What would I have done going? Gone

to Ellisdean, indeed—I who haven't slept out of my own house for twenty years!

'I suppose Lady Augusta knows that you don't visit anywhere.'

'It's no matter to me whether she knows it or not.'

'Did you notice this postscript, aunt?'

'O yes; I noticed the *postscript*. I only hope I'll not be troubled with the Ellisdean folk calling on me. What need they come for? I've said already what I'm to give you.—There, Marian, put up that letter, and don't stand wasting your time over it. If you're going to Ellisdean next week, you'll need to be busy this one. You see, Lady Augusta thinks your clothes aren't good enough.'

'I—I never thought of my clothes,' exclaimed Marian in sudden dismay.

'Then you'd better think of them a little.'

And for some hours following, Marian did think of them with ever-increasing distraction. In the middle of her cogitations over her scanty wardrobe, Frank arrived, and she was summoned down-stairs. She was scarcely yet on sufficiently familiar terms with him to like to confess to him the poverty-stricken condition of her apparel, and actually to draw his attention to the shabbiness of the gown she was wearing. But though he might not remark it, certainly his mother and sister would; and how would they like it? In spite of her happiness—for he had brought her his mother's letter—she could not quite forget the embarrassments which she had left up-stairs; and Frank was slightly vexed by her gravity.

'I'll tell you what it is, Marian; you must go to Ellisdean at once,' he said imperatively. 'You've been moped to death long enough in this little hole of a parlour.'

'Hush, hush!' she interrupted. 'Barbara will hear you.'

'Who's Barbara? But do you hear?—you shall go to Ellisdean to-morrow.'

'Impossible. Besides, I'm not asked to go until next week.'

'Pshaw! That only means that you're expected to be there next week for these confounded parties. Though it's all right that there should be parties for you, darling; so don't look as if I wanted to grudge you the diversion, though I would rather have you all to myself.'

'Ah, I would rather there should be no parties,' said Marian earnestly. 'Will they—will they be very large parties?'

'How can I tell? Of course, my mother is dying to shew you to all the county, and so am I, for that matter.'

'But—tell me—do you think they will be very—very—I mean— The truth is, I am not accustomed to go to parties, you know; and I shouldn't like Lady Augusta to be annoyed. She will think I'm badly dressed. Couldn't I escape the parties?'

'No. Why should you want to escape them?—Your dress! Oh, never mind your dress; nobody will think about your dress'—he looked fondly into her face, then added, laughing: 'nobody, at least, except Harriet—Mrs Everard, you know. You needn't hope to rival her, I can tell you.'

This was hardly encouraging, but Marian smiled and felt happier after he went away. How could she help being happy, even though things were not yet quite smooth for her, and though now and then the haunting shadow again crossed her mind, and she

sighed to herself half reproachfully: 'Poor Neil! He is dead—he must be dead; and I seem only to have become sure of it now when I mustn't think of him, or speak of him any more. It is as if he had died, and I had never mourned for him at all. And yet, how kind he was to me, long ago!'

After her uncomfortable dialogue with her aunt over Lady Augusta's letter, she did not venture to introduce the subject again of her visit to Ellisdean. She hoped that Lady Augusta would call and smooth down Miss Gilmour's evidently ruffled mood. The latter was too proud to admit that she set any value on the civility, and did not speak of it, only shewing herself cross to Marian, and ungracious to Frank, who, it must be said, displayed far less tact in his behaviour towards her than his elder brother, and constantly terrified Marian by the easy good-humoured audacity with which he made himself at home in the little parlour, which certainly seemed to lose much of its dullness and dreariness as he sat laughing and chatting, and making Marian laugh and talk too, even under the very shadow of her aunt's disapproving frown. Miss Gilmour's sternness and peevishness were lost upon the careless Frank, who, spoiled at home and spoiled in his regiment, had been all his life accustomed to treat a chance rebuke which might fall to his lot as a mere pleasant joke, and whose cheerful temper was, so long as no particular provocation befell it, proof against the mere general woes of life.

Sometimes—and how Marian's heart danced when she saw these rare gleams of sunshine—even Miss Gilmour could not refrain from smiling at Frank's stories, and as he did not know of the relapse into additional glumness which was sure to follow when she was alone with her niece, after having been thus betrayed into levity, he was deluded into a happy satisfaction with the progress he was making in the old lady's good graces. She was never absolutely uncivil to him, nor did she give any sign of repenting her encouragement of his proposals to Marian, and though she was stiff and silent, and short in her answers, she did not try to pick any quarrel with him. On the whole, she seemed to him a very dreary, but perfectly harmless old woman, and if her manners were not of the pleasantest, she was Marian's aunt, to whom much might be forgiven. Marian herself, in her anxiety to make each think well of the other, did her best to smooth away all roughnesses, and to bring out as far as she could the best side, and not the worst, of her aunt's character.

One day, Frank brought his sister to call, and she brought with her renewed excuses from her mother, whose cold still confined her to the house. This call was a nervous business for Marian, though it was productive of some good to her in one way. But at the time she was perfectly miserable. Before Kate Crawford had been talking to Miss Gilmour for five minutes, they were both high and dry—the young lady rebuffed and uncomfortable under the chill silence with which her apologies for her mother had been received, and vainly wishing that her brother would leave Marian's side and come to her help; the other concealing as usual, or partially concealing, her awkward shyness under a cold rigidity of manner not favourable to conversation, and further embarrassing her visitor by the steadfastness with which she kept her eyes fixed on Kate's gown. 'I was in pain until I got into the carriage again,' said Kate in describing the call,

'and looked to see what was the matter with my dress; I expected to find some disgraceful tear.'

Marian in the meantime was also wishing that Frank would either go himself, or let her go to the relief of the two, whom she had at first mistakenly left to themselves. At last, she made her escape from him; but her secession to the other party scarcely improved the position of affairs; Kate turned eagerly to talk to her, and Miss Gilmour sat by, more mute, and staring at Miss Crawford's dress more persistently than ever. But when the visitors were gone, and while Kate and her brother were condoling with themselves on their way out to Ellisdean—the former complaining of Miss Gilmour's unpleasantness, the latter of Marian's neglect of himself—the aunt and niece, after an interval of silence, which was to Marian full of threatening significance, began gradually to discuss the call also.

'So that's Miss Crawford! I think little of her. A senseless, giggling lassie. What was the use of Lady Augusta sending her to call on me?' said Miss Gilmour, taking up Lady Augusta's card, and tossing it contemptuously to a side-table, where, however, it continued to hold a very prominent position for some weeks.

'I wish Lady Augusta were able to come herself, Aunt Sarah; I'm sure you would like her,' said Marian, rather despondingly.

'If she's no better than her daughter, I don't care to see her. I've no fancy for your young ladies who can laugh and chatter with other young people, but don't care to trouble themselves to speak to an old woman who might be their grandmother. Mind, Marian, when you go to Ellisdean, you needn't be copying any of their silly fashions—you're getting into them already, and it doesn't please me. And—until Lady Augusta calls on me herself, she'll not get me to go near Ellisdean. You may tell her that. I'm for none of their airs. I'm as well born as any of them.'

'O Aunt Sarah, Miss Crawford said'—

'I don't care for what Miss Crawford said. The Crawfords indeed! And what did Lady Augusta mean by finding fault with your dress? as if it wasn't good enough for *her* daughter-in-law! I can dress you better than Miss Crawford if I like, and I will. What had she on to-day but a common merino! You'll go into Whiteford this very day, Marian, and take twenty pounds with you, and buy yourself clothes, and the best silk gown you can get. You shall appear at Ellisdean next week as my niece. There, child; put that into your pocket. It's not often, I'm thinking, that Miss Crawford gets twenty pounds to spend!'

CHAPTER VI.

The east winds had ceased to blow; the last threatening of a return of winter weather had passed away; the sweet soft spring days had really come, when Marian went to Ellisdean. In an ecstasy of almost childish happiness, she drove away from Holly Bank one day in the carriage which had been sent for her—wondering if it would be possible to feel happier on her wedding-day as she drove along, revelling in the fresh air, the country sights and sounds which met her as she got away from the dusty high-road, and the dull suburban environs which she knew so well, and of which she was so weary. She had been somewhat dreading her leave-taking of her aunt; but, for a wonder, Miss

Gilmour had been in a good-humour that morning, and all, even to the packing of Marian's boxes, and the provisioning her purse with a fresh supply of pocket-money, had gone on well. Miss Gilmour had kissed her when she bade her good-bye, and had even vouchsafed to send a civil message to Lady Augusta. So Marian was happier than she had been since the first day of her engagement, and the little touch of regret with which she bade farewell for a fortnight to her lonely old aunt, only pleasantly softened the parting.

Truth to say, her regrets were soon over. She was going to Ellisdean at last; to Frank's home, and to the mother and sister who were very soon to be her own mother and sister. Of the other members of the family she hardly thought, until, as the carriage entered the handsome old gateway, and drove past the pretty, trimly kept lodge into the Ellisdean avenue, a feeling of nervous fright came over her, and she shrank into a corner of the big carriage, unable to enjoy the beauty of this pleasantest part of the drive, or the fragrance of the woods, freshly awakened, as if to greet her, by a light spring shower, for the alarm with which she thought of her solitary arrival. She had expected Kate to come for her; and though she had felt relieved when the carriage arrived empty, because she saw that her aunt disliked having to receive Miss Crawford again, it was anything but a relief now to be alone. She could only hope that the first person she encountered might not be Mrs Everard Crawford, whom she had not seen since their meeting at Mrs Richardson's. Mrs Everard, however, was out driving with Kate, whom she had impressed into attendance on her really to prevent her going to fetch Miss Keir. Frank was not to come out until the following day. But Everard having got his wife safely out of the way, took care to be at hand to receive the young guest. The old butler, too, came himself with benign alacrity to help her to descend from the carriage; and as she was led through the homely, old-fashioned passages, and broad, roomy landing-places, to the drawing-room, where Everard said his mother was waiting for her, her timidity seemed to pass away; the kindly welcoming look of the old servant (how different from the austere and spiteful Barbara!) seemed to cheer and enliven her; and as for Everard—if she had not been in love with Frank, she would certainly have run some risk of being fascinated by his brother's cordial anxiety to make her feel herself already at home at Ellisdean.

Indeed, she had scarcely been ten minutes in the house before she felt that she had come to her real home at last. There she sat in the drawing-room—which, if it was not so grand and stately a room as she had expected to find, was infinitely more cheerful and comfortable—on a low stool at Lady Augusta's feet, while her hat was being removed and her hair smoothed by Lady Augusta's own hands, and the toilet was being constantly interrupted by a caress or a tender flattering gaze of admiration. Everard had judiciously left them to their own devices; and his mother, who was always under some constraint in his presence, found herself at liberty to say what she liked, and make as much as she pleased of her new pet without fear of his courteous ironical observations. She was eager to apologise for Kate's absence, as well as for that of her daughter-in-law.

'You mustn't think it unkind that they are not

here to meet you. Poor dear Harriet has been ill, like me; she's constantly fancying herself ill, poor dear, and to-day she thought she would like a drive; so, as the carriage had gone for you, Kate took her out in the pony-phæton. They will be home soon, I daresay.—There they come, I declare. How provoking! I had so much to say to you, my dear. You—you know Harriet, don't you?

'I haven't been introduced to her; I saw her one day at Mrs Richardson's,' said Marian quite calmly, for the reception she was enjoying had raised her spirits, and made her feel indifferent about the introduction to Mrs Everard. Why should she be afraid of her, when everybody else, Mrs Everard's own husband included, was so kind? She *did* seem less amiable, and her manners were certainly less pleasant than the manners of the other ladies of the family. But the unpleasantness might be quite unintentional. 'I will try to like her, and make her like me too,' thought Marian, with perhaps a little vain self-confidence, for it is possible that Lady Augusta's petting, to which she was so little accustomed, had slightly turned her head. And as they came in, she got up from her footstool with a bright, happy smile, and came forward to meet and return Kate's sisterly embrace, and turned frankly and readily to offer her hand to Mrs Everard, who had got ready a stiff courtesy, but found herself obliged, much against her will, to shake hands with at least an appearance of friendliness.

Then tea came in. Lady Augusta, Kate, and Marian were soon cosily enjoying their cups round the fireside, the last half-smiling to herself between pleasure and amusement as she thought what her aunt would say, could she witness the luxurious little refection which was nearly as much a novelty to herself. Lady Augusta, patting her cheek—Marian had returned to her lowly seat—asked her what she was laughing at; and Mrs Everard, sipping her tea on a more distant ottoman in sulky silence, looked sharply across at her.

'I was only thinking—everything seems so strange to me,' Marian said, looking round her with another musing smile.

'My love, you mustn't feel strange long,' said Lady Augusta, stooping to kiss her. Mrs Everard got up and rustled out of the room.

'Is Harriet very tired?' asked Lady Augusta of her daughter, anxiously. Kate hesitated a moment, then got up too, and followed her sister-in-law, hoping that the guest had not remarked the look of temper with which Harriet had taken her departure. It seemed only natural at first to try to conceal their little family worries, even from the one who must soon be initiated into such family secrets.

Then Lady Augusta, quite pleased to get Marian to herself, began to speak to her of Frank and her engagement; and Marian, equally pleased to have an opportunity of doing so, confessed how she had been forced into playing the eavesdropper at the bazaar, and how she had voluntarily avoided meeting them. Lady Augusta shook her head. 'You couldn't help it, of course,' she said; 'but oh, my dear, when I think how unhappy poor Frank was that day! And you must have seen it, and yet you could go away without trying to speak to him!'

'I was very unhappy too.'

'Well, thank goodness, everything is right now, so we won't talk more about it.' But they both went on talking until a gong sounded, and Lady Augusta started up.

'I didn't think it was so late. Come, come, my dear; I must send you to your room. I wanted to take you to see poor Mr Crawford, but we must wait till after dinner. He's a sad invalid, poor man, but he's very anxious to see you.—Where's Kate, I wonder? Ah, I suppose Harriet has kept her to talk about her dress. Harriet is so particular about her dress. And talking of that, you must put on something pretty to-night, Marian, for some friends are coming to dinner, and I want you to look nice—though I'm sure you must always look nice. Stay; I'll ring for somebody to shew you to your room—or no; I'll take you to it myself. Come with me.' So, to Marian's relief, for the gong had startlingly reminded her of the boxes still waiting to be unpacked, and the dress to be arranged, and of the company which threatened her, they set out for the room assigned her, but which she thought they were never to reach, for her hostess stopped so often to take breath, or to point out something to her in their route, that Marian began to think with dismay of the probability of her being late for dinner, and wished that her kind conductress had left her to the care of a servant. She became bewildered, too, with the intricacies of the passages and quaint up-and-down flights of stairs, and more impressed by the size and grandeur of the house than she had been at first. Lady Augusta talked all the time. And when, after clambering up a turret staircase, they reached, at last, a pleasant, comfortable-looking room, where a bright fire and lighted candles welcomed Marian, making her almost forget her anxieties in wonder at the luxuries provided for her, Lady Augusta sank down on a chair to rest after her exertions, and to enjoy a little further chat.

'I hope you'll be comfortable, my dear.—You haven't brought a maid! But how nice that is, to be so independent. And really, maids are such nuisances. Not that I should say so, for I've got a very nice one, and Kate has such a clever, obliging little French girl—quite a treasure! But Harriet's — Well, no doubt she has a good deal to do, for Harriet is so dependent on attendance, you know. But her maids always give themselves such airs, and quarrel so with the other servants. There was only last week — But, dear me, I mustn't stay talking here, for it's high time to dress, and we mustn't be late for dinner. Everard is always annoyed if one is late. Such a pity Frank couldn't come out until to-morrow. What a tiresome man that colonel must be; though, indeed, he's very gentlemanly and pleasant to speak to. He and his wife are coming to dinner on Friday. And the Campbells—do you know the Campbells? Such nice people! Mrs Campbell is a particular friend of mine. Well, I must run away. Is this all your luggage? Dear me, you should see Harriet's trunks. People require such quantities of luggage nowadays. When I was a girl, it was different. But I'm forgetting that it's so late, and I've got to dress. And, my dear, I hope you won't be late—Everard is always cross—I mean, he doesn't like us to be late.'

'I shall certainly be late!' poor Marian said to herself, as she at last plunged into her unpacking. 'What shall I do? And O dear, how am I to find my way back to the drawing-room? How nice it would be to have a maid to help one! I wonder—might I ring? No; nonsense! How angry Aunt Sarah would be; she would say I was getting spoilt

already. Poor Aunt Sarah, I wonder if she misses me. How kind she was this morning; and she has given me these pretty dresses.' In the midst of her hurry, Marian could not help pausing a moment to look at the pretty soft white muslin, with its delicate garniture of lace and blue ribbon, which she was extricating from her box, and which having only been sent home that morning, she had not yet had time to admire. But soon a distant bell startled her again, and she flew to her toilet, encouraging herself, however, by the recollection of how kindly Mr Everard Crawford had received her, and how good-natured he seemed. After all, she could not be very much afraid even of this autocrat of the house.

But it was the first time since her schooldays that she had dressed 'for a party.' Everything seemed to go wrong in her nervous haste. Even the usually deft fingers, which could plait hair and tie ribbons with such neatness and dexterity, were awkward and unsteady. The strings went into knots, the hair would not lie smooth, the pins refused to stay in their places. She could hear a sound as of carriages arriving, and an imposing rustling of silks; and the sharp, high tones of Mrs Everard's voice in a neighbouring passage warned her that the family were assembling. She would be late; she would perhaps keep everybody waiting, and have to go in all alone! She could almost have wished herself back at Holly Bank. The pretty flushed face was already almost tearful with fright and vexation, when a little tap at her door made her start up joyfully. Somebody was coming to her help.

The somebody proved to be the pleasant little French maid, sent by Kate to her assistance. Marian sank back in her chair with a sigh of relief. In three minutes, the rebellious hair was arranged; the lovely white camellia bud, also sent by the considerate Kate, was fixed amongst the soft, dark, golden-threaded coils; the dress went on so quickly, the finishing touches were given so skilfully, and the girl stood before the large mirror, smiling and blushing at her own beauty, which she beheld for the first time set off to such advantage, while the delighted Frenchwoman volubly expressed her admiration, and assured Mademoiselle that she was charming.

After this, Marian's difficulties were at an end. She had even the luck of falling in with Lady Augusta herself on her way to the drawing-room, equally late, and equally glad to meet a companion in disgrace. 'We'll go in together,' she said quite seriously, 'and then Everard can't scold us.' Marian laughed at the old lady's grave tone. She could not help it; she was so light-hearted and happy. Then Lady Augusta smiled too. 'Ah, what a comfort it is you're not shy, my dear,' she said. 'I can't get on with shy people; I'm so shy myself. And how sweet and pretty you look, and what a pretty dress! How could they say—' The sentence was left unfinished, and in the excitement of entering the drawing-room, Lady Augusta's rather awkward exclamation was forgotten. But as they passed the sofa where Mrs Everard sat in pomp and splendour, the latter, though not generally quick of apprehension, understood her mother-in-law's look of complacent pride as she advanced, with the blooming, graceful girl at her side, and proceeded to introduce her to the

principal guests. Then Everard came forward, perhaps also a little struck by the unexpected brilliancy of Marian's début, for his manner to her was almost deferential in its politeness, and even his wife's presence did not prevent him from standing talking to her for the two or three minutes which followed before dinner was announced. How could this pleasant, good-tempered gentleman be supposed to be so easily made cross! In her happy spirits, she made a kind of jesting apology for her own delay, and was even half inclined to tell him how his mother had maligned him to her, and frightened her with the threat of his displeasure. Mrs Everard, on the other side of the room, could hear her sweet gay laugh, and see her husband smile as he answered her, and could take note at her leisure of the unlooked-for daintiness of the pretty, simple dress, the grace of the delicate, flower-crowned head, the fineness of the lace and muslin, which could challenge comparison with her own costly trimmings. But she looked and listened in silence, and Marian talked gaily and unsuspectingly on.

She was more silent at dinner, the length and sumptuousness, not to say the solemnity of which awed her a good deal. Yet she was far from finding it dull. She was too shy and excited to be hungry, but she enjoyed watching the other people eating their dinner, and still more she enjoyed the sight of the plate and crystal, and the profusion of flowers—common enough greenhouse plants—but, to her eyes, of rare and wonderful beauty. She was glad, moreover, to be still and silent for a while, to think over all this amazing good fortune which had come to her, to compare her present happiness with the dullness and gloom of her past life, and to think how Frank would be with her to-morrow, and all the pleasure would be doubled.

After dinner, she was taken to be introduced to old Mr Crawford. The poor paralytic cripple was a sorrowful sight; and after the first shock of surprise, Marian in her pity longed to be allowed to stay with him, and cheer him in his solitude. But his wife and family were accustomed to the sight of his infirmities and sufferings, and he himself was too much used to be left to amuse himself, to invite her to remain with him. He was pleased with her, however, and looked wistfully after her as Lady Augusta took her away, saying as they reached the door: 'You must come back and see me again, my dear, to-morrow.—Mind, my lady, that she's to come back to me.'

'Mightn't I stay a little longer now?' whispered Marian; but Lady Augusta said: 'No, no, my love; we can't spare you just now. You can go and sit with poor Mr Crawford at any time, you know, and he'll be quite glad to have you, poor man. When Frank's at home, he sits with his father a good deal. Frank's very good to him; and Everard—Everard is so useful, I don't know what we should do without him. I've such reason to be thankful for my sons, Marian.'

When Marian lay down to sleep that night, her heart brimming over with happiness and gratitude, it was with the resolution that she would do her utmost to make Lady Augusta and Mr Crawford thankful also for having herself as a daughter.